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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

NOVEMBER 28 1980

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The profession of care

By Stuart Sutherland

C. BREWER AND J. LAIT:
Can Social Work Survive?
235pp. Temple Smith. £9.95.
0 8517 188 5

All professions are periodically subject to public censure. The arrangements of doctors, the restrictive practices of lawyers, and the idiosyncrasies of academics are common targets, but no one has suggested that any of these callings should be abolished. Can Social Work Survive? questions the viability of a whole profession, and might more aptly have been entitled Can Social Workers Survive?

De Colin Brewer, a psychiatrist, and Mrs June Lait, a one-time social worker who now lectures on Social Policy, present a formidable indictment. They argue that whereas other professions exist to fill a need, social workers declared themselves to be a profession and have ever since been looking for a need to fill; what they do requires only the application of common sense and some sympathy, but they have devised elaborate training courses which by their analysis deprive them of any common sense they might have had; they are unable to keep records even when legally required to do so; some are Marxists who use their posts to subvert the state while demanding ever higher wages for their activity; most are well-meaning innocents who think the lot of the poor and homeless can be improved by some amateurish psychotherapy. Regardless of the truth of these views, the history of social work reads like a satire on contemporary Britain; it exemplifies the modern tendency to professionalise all activities, and the reliance on the often vicious judgments of committees.

Until recently social workers were employed by many different agencies and did a variety of clearly different jobs: for example, psychiatric social workers were employed either in hospitals or in child guidance clinics as assistants to educational psychologists. In the 1950s and 1960s some social workers became dissatisfied with their subordinated role. Doubtless encouraged by the inflated growth of the social sciences, particularly sociology, they attempted to establish social work as a coherent profession offering a unique service to the public. Foremost among the promoters of the special virtues of social work was Dame Eileen Young, who in 1961 defined a common professional goal as illustrated by her own attempts: "The Social Worker is concerned with remedying certain deficiencies which may exist in the relationship between the individual and his environment, and with the individual in relation to the whole of his environment." Her definition is no vaguer than many others (for example, "social workers are concerned to enhance the capacities of the particular client to deal effectively and appropriately with situations"), but despite the fashionable appeal of talk about the "whole man" or "the total individual", it remains unclear just what social work has to offer.

Notwithstanding the vagueness of its aims, social work became sanctified as a discrete discipline under the Social Services Act of 1970, which forced local authorities to create autonomous Social Service departments under whose aegis all social workers were to fall. Brewer and Lait point out that no clear purpose has ever been produced for the unifying social work in this way. The only cogent argument given in the Seaborn report, on whose recommendations the Act was largely based, was that large departments of social workers would "have a better career structure". Thus the 1970 Act both freed social workers from acting as assistants to other specialists and provided the bureaucracy required for supplying highly paid posts to which members of the profession might aspire.

One way of distinguishing the professions from the professionals is that the former merely serve an acknowledged need, while the latter take an

officially approved course, preferably at a university. This point was not lost on social workers' leaders, and accordingly they established in 1971 a body with the august title, "The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work". One of its functions was to vet courses held at universities and other institutions in order to mitigate the deficiencies of others, an argument enthusiastically endorsed by Brewer and Lait. Yet the only way in which the difficulties of the present system could be avoided would be to let the social worker be used by the state and financial subvention of the needs in the hands of one agency; since such a measure would eliminate many jobs both in the civil service and in local government, it is unlikely ever to be adopted and the need for some profession to help the needy to negotiate the swamps of different relief agencies will remain.

Apart from needing practical advice and help, the old man living on their own are often starved of companionship and may look forward to the visit of the social worker as the most important event of the week. Brewer and Lait would solve the loneliness of the old by throwing the responsibility for looking after them on their children, but such a change in social mores however desirable cannot be brought about by government decree. One of their main arguments against making social workers into a profession is that everything they do could be done as well or better by workers with a different training. A health visitor would relieve the loneliness as effectively as a social worker.

Social workers have not been conspicuously successful in saving battered children, and Brewer and Lait suggest that one reason for their failure is that they have a naive faith in the importance of the relationship between the child and his biological parents. To judge by the number of cases in which children are forcibly returned from a good foster-home to the care of evil or negligent parents, this silly belief is shared by the courts. It is likely, as the authors contend, that health visitors would be more effective in spotting children at risk, if only because they have a clear reason for asking to see a child and for examining it closely.

Brewer and Lait note that in helping the mentally ill or the emotionally disturbed, social workers are likely to be less effective than psychiatric nurses, who have a training not merely in psychotherapy but in diagnosis, and who can administer drugs and injections. Forty per cent of the mental patients dealt with by social workers are chronic schizophrenics and a psychiatric nurse should be better able to assess the current clinical condition of such patients than a social worker with little or no medical training. Brewer and Lait claim that many social workers are antipathetic to physical treatments, such as electro-convulsive therapy and the use of psychotropic drugs. Inflicting this belief on mentally disturbed patients could do serious damage by reducing the patients' confidence in such methods of treatment or by making them refuse these altogether.

Social workers are also castigated for being unscientific, and for having failed to show by carefully designed research that they are achieving useful results; but the goals of social work are so vague that it is hard to lay down criteria whereby to judge its outcome. Many of the studies that have been undertaken have not revealed any beneficial effect of social casework; others have been so poorly controlled that their results are meaningless. One of the more convincing is an investigation undertaken in Leeds on two ways of dealing with schoolboy truancy. The usual treatment is to place the child under a supervision order; he is then seen by a social worker or probation officer from time to time. The Leeds magistrates cooperated in an experiment in which half the truants selected at random were dealt with in this way. The rest had their cases repeatedly adjourned so that the child's parents had to appear again and again in court; persistent truants were threatened

with being taken from their families and placed "in care". The group supervised by social workers stayed truant significantly more often than those dealt with solely by the courts; they also committed five times as many crimes.

The few cases where social field-work has been shown to have some small but significant benefit do not establish that social workers are bringing any special skills to bear. Indeed a recent review (published too late to be used by Brewer and Lait) concludes that, if anything, amateur counsellors are more effective than professionals.

The book has two minor irritants. The constant use of the pronoun "We" (in expressions like "We seriously question...") makes for an unduly pontifical style reminiscent of W. H. Auden at his worst, while the shoddy proof-reading produces some curious phrases like "She had a general health overnight function".

Of more importance is that much of the evidence adduced against the efficacy of social work consists of instances where a social worker can be shown to have acted in a foolish or unhelpful way: it is hard to know whether such cases are typical. Again, the book makes considerable play with the fact that a ten-month strike of social field-workers in Tower Hamlets produced no obvious adverse effects, but no careful investigation was undertaken and the authors rely on journalistic accounts. Although the social workers may not have been much missed, at least the strike brought no dramatic benefits to the community, unlike the recent strike of doctors in Los Angeles which was accompanied by a 27 per cent decrease in mortality rate. It is inevitable that in the absence of more rigorous studies, Brewer and Lait fall back on such impressionistic evidence; one would have more sympathy with their dilemma were it not for their repeatedly avowed faith in science as a panacea. They affirm that, numerate scientists, like physicists and chemists, are the people best qualified to evaluate social work; this curious belief is not supported by the record of physical scientists when passing judgment on human affairs. It is a mistake to believe that rigorous and objective thinking is peculiar to physical scientists.

Brewer and Lait recognize that their condemnation of the social worker in the field is based on insufficient evidence and they call for a government inquiry to establish whether social workers actually do, how effective they are in the eyes of those they attempt to help, and how they are seen by other professions with whom they work: in the light of these findings the inquiry would decide what, if anything, they ought to be doing. Such an inquiry has in fact since been inaugurated by the Secretary of State for Social Services, but he has flouted Brewer and Lait's recommendation that it should have an independent chairperson by giving the position to the present chairman of the National Institute of Social Work. Brewer and Lait believe that autonomous departments of social workers should be abolished, and that social workers should be attached as assistants to other agencies with a more clearly defined role such as hospitals, general practices, housing departments, or the Department of Health and Social Services. It is unlikely that a committee chaired by an expert in social work will recommend any such thing. Moreover the Secretary of State has made the ominous statement that the committee will consider the definition of social work, thus recapitulating the old mistake of defining a profession and then looking for a need for it to fill, rather than looking at real needs and deciding who can best fill them. It could be argued that it makes little sense to consider social workers in isolation from the ramshackle mass of other social services created by arbitrary and isolated government decisions. The task of simplifying these services and organizing them in such a way that they readily respond to the needs of the community would be extremely complex, but the longer it is left the more entrenched will the existing bureaucracies become and the more difficult it will be to effect any change.

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There were few formally educated lecturers. Students either joined together in lecture discussion groups, or were taught by "workers intellectuals". The subject-matter varied—industrial unionism combined with marxism, Darwinism with Gibbon, *The Communist Manifesto* with Nietzsche, *Positive Ontology* with Piatetsky. This, argues Macgregor, was the authentic base of British marxism: spontaneous, local, undirected, a part. And, above all, it was working class. And, from a proletarian viewpoint, where bourgeois intellectuals, however sympathetic, played no part.

Contamination came after war. It was the

In developing this theme Macintyre looks at British Marxism, dogma, and its relationship to 'what he calls "Labour Socialism"'. With close with a head for this kind of close canonical analysis, it is extremely well done. The author shows a deep appreciation of detail, the subtlety and nuance, and the unweaved the tortuous patterns of the literature with great skill. The best chapters, however, are the two on autodidact tradition itself, and the point is well made that the tradition of the labour code was a direct result of the labour code transformed a state of working-class leadership in this country.

Change and Tradition in Rural England (291pp. Cambridge University Press. £10.50. 0 521 22546 9) is an anthology of writings on country life chosen and edited by David Thompson. Among the authors included are Wordsworth, Cobbett, Jefferies, Sturt, Hardy, Hudson and Flora Thompson.

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In his book *The Survivor*, Terence des Pres has written of the need and will to "bear witness" on the part of people who survived the death camps. Haima Heger's telling of the story of an anonymous homosexual survivor in *The Men with the Pink Triangle* is a moving example of such witnessing. Up until recently, little has been heard or known about the persecution of homosexuals in the concentration camps. Understandably, given the centrality of antisemitism to Hitler's ideology and the murder of the six million, the main concentration in studies of the holocaust has been Jewish victims. But perhaps up to the mid-1970s, the deaths at the hands of the Nazis through being starved and worked to death, shot or gassed along with Jews, these were communists and socialists, political prisoners, slave labourers, gypsies, homosexuals, and "asocials" who were predominantly male homosexuals.

Accounts by homosexual victims have been almost nonexistent because there were few survivors and because of fear by those sur-

the public's growing interest in information about the persecution of homosexuals. The situation surrounding the camps seems to be ending.

was originally published in 1972, *The Men with Triangle* (a reference to the pink triangle used to identify homosexuals) was one of the first attempts to break that silence, at times at the expense of the account of a man who twenty-two years old at the time of his arrest in his native Germany. He describes isolation, starvation and torture, and what he expects from the future. What is added is that homosexuals in the camps were often despised and persecuted by other inmates. The man who wrote the book was at a low level of the camp hierarchy, and his account of the camps was for a kind of hideous and dehumanization of man of society in general. He subject over his own life, and his life was saved by the

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education. It was the role of the universities and intellectuals, labour colleges and Soviet teachers, which helped to make sure that the relationship of the Comintern to the working State would be that of a historical chain of command. The result was the recruitment of a new and autonomous working-class movement with a derivative tendency, inappropriate to British needs and forming no part of a national culture. Out of this came the effectiveness and rigidity, and the ineffectiveness and flexibility, of the separation of Marxism from British capitalism.

In developing this theme, the book's language looks at British marxist dogmatism, and its relationship to what the author calls "Labour Socialism" in contrast with a head-on kind of orthodox canonical analysis, it is excellent as well done. The author shows a fine appreciation of doctrinal subtlety and nuance, and unravels the curious passages of the literature with great skill. The best chapters, in my opinion, are on the autodidactic tradition itself, and the rise of the labour colleges and the rise of state education transformed the nature of working-class leadership

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commentary

The Moor, the braggart and the jester

session, but in Verdi it is a comic

Otello
Covent Garden
Falstaff
Kent Opera
Rigoletto
DGG 2740 225

La Coven Garden's revival of *Otello*, Jon Vickers has been giving us an extraordinary performance, not of the musical voluptuary who is Verdi's hero but of his prototype, Shakespeare's tormented Othello. On the river at the National, meanwhile, Pavarotti has been classically crooning and Scottfield takes his way through Shakespeare's play as if it were Verdi's opera. Scottfield relinquishes himself to the music of the play's language, while Pavarotti strains to sing it, vocally, neurotically straining himself to the natural limits in range, refusing to let an anguished whisper in the passages of self-accusation—*vexes* and *worries*—Verdi's music, seeking to value what is verbal and dramatic in the music, and then being humiliated and altered. Otello himself, to Desdemona sing, remarks "Quel canto mi conquide": music dissolves the disquiet of dramatic action and heals antagonisms, distributing a great consolation. Vickers resists this antiphony.

The blandness of Covent Garden's interpreters of these roles, which disqualify them, is in the opera a virtue: Teresa Zylla-Gara is an immodest Desdemona, Renato Bruson an imperturbable Iago. Against them, Vickers sets the violent, verbally emphatic, usually schizoid Otello of Vickers, his voice hurtling between martial mellifluousness and an almost feminine mellifluousness, outraging the musical line to dramatic points. The lament for Otello's lost glory isn't the vocal threnody of Plácido Domingo made it earlier this year at Covent Garden but a desperate soliloquy, articulated on a thread that sends as Vickers couldn't bear to say out these appalling, self-incriminating words let alone to sing them. His verbal and dramatic integrity unbalances the work, and suggests a contradiction in the notion of opera as musical drama—are the two alter-

A similar problem arises with Jonathan Miller's production of *Falstaff* for Kien's Opera. I saw it in Bath minus the sets, which had threatened to bring down the roof of the theatre, but Miller's intentions could be inferred from the vividness of the comic playing and the gruesome Flemish realism of the costumes. Miller sees Verdi's Windsor as a rough village, a place of coarse and riotous feasting; Falstaff's cronies are ill-proportioned winos; a tangled public undergrowth sprouts from Fenton's copdaco; for the finale in the wood, the character doesn't effloresce into Zefferino-willow, but withers and spouts ugly beaked musks. Miller clinches from lyricism.

In his National Theatre production of *The Merchant of Venice* he parodied the musical revival of "I'll sweet the moonlight revels up on this bank" first by having the "happy towns" Lorenzo hastily unroll a rug and lay down a rug on the ground-rug before he'd commit himself to sitting on that arboral bank, and then by instructing Jessica to nod off during the recitation of the "I'll sweet" line, thus making a performance of an opera. Miller's uses of music have an un-musical irony. In *The Merchant of Venice* the violin started up not to herald the entrance of Portia but to herald her exit. When he memorialized her fortune; and in Miller's brilliant Freudian *Measure for Measure* the scenes were punctuated by the music of the "I'll sweet" comedies of the Second Vienna School. But Verdi is irrepressible

branch from out the land") and of the
their eventual salvation through
Cuba's intervention with the Re-

...the King Ahasuerus is perfectly
...to a production of this ele-
...kind. The ingenious two-
...set, the simplicity of perform-
...the, the high standard of singing
...Sandra Dugdale as Esther and Paul
...wood as Ahasuerus); a chorus

much improved on recent years, and the firm conducting of Charles Armstrong contribute to the success of the production.

Exo, first seen in this production in 1977, is a different matter. The parts of the Emperor Valentino and his general *Exo* were last time sung by a castror and a female voice respectively; this time the voices have been switched and the dramatic point of view is better. But the plot will very probably be the same.

In the programme notes, the eighteenth-century opera *Exo* stands up well. The plot is made up of an amazing complexity, which no great surprises for

desirous of marrying at once a very wealthy lady. . . . It would cost \$25,000, the adviser made clear, to get \$125,000 down as key-money so to speak, plus whatever it took annually to keep both of them in a style fitting to their rank. On the other side of the Atlantic, in New York, the broker advertised for "any dukes, counts, barons, or other noblemen desirous of marrying, for the purpose of marriage, young, beautiful and rich American heiresses." Impoverished peers acted on their own account; but it was to deal on the whole with ambitious mothers, but not with the girls themselves. After Mrs. Stevens became Mrs. Arthur Paget, and a leading member of the Prince of Wales's set, she in London and her mother in New York set up what amounted to a transatlantic marriage bureau, with Mrs. Arthur Paget, at her mother's instigation, who introduced Consuelo Vanderbilt to the Duke of Marlborough.

These money-marriages bypassed the British class problem. To the English, all Americans were equally awful or equally enchanting; there was no common tribal yardstick to "place" them by. And America had developed oddly: an achievement-based democracy with no formal honours system, it compensated by evolving a hierarchy of petty distinctions and fierce social jealousies. This had some strange results, best illustrated by a remark made by an American woman to Trollope's mother and quoted in *Dr. Cook*. Neither Henry James nor Edith Wharton would have put the point of view quite so baldly as this American buccaneer did; but then, he was anxious to make her position absolutely clear.

Certainly if I was in England, I should not think of associating with anything but lords. I have always been amongst the first here, and if I travelled I should do the same. I don't mean, I'm sure, that I would not come to see you, but you know you are not lords, and therefore I know very well how you are treated in your own country.

David Hockney's subtle, composed etching and aquatint, "The Painter at Work" (1972) is taken from Stephen Calloway's authoritative, fully illustrated English Prints for the Collector (232pp., Lutterworth Press, £15. 0 7188 2447 4) which surveys the work of all the major artists and engravers, and that of many of the lesser known printmakers, from the beginnings of the form to its most recent expressions.

By David Edgar

Nunn could have provided another, albeit embryonic, sign of the times: since Michael Pye wrote that the RSC receives little or no support from private industry, the company has begun to receive widespread sponsorship for some individual productions from a number of British companies, including two banks, Ladbroke's, Hallmark Cards, and IRL.

The main thesis of *Altogether* then, is that trends to be stated rather than demonstrated; and this is true, only in so far as it is true that the author knows that he is writing a book which will be read by the machines of popular culture, but will he be able to say precisely about the way in which these machines, which have little or no complex way in which the popular entertainment does or does not reflect and promote the ideology of the owners of its means of production—the creation of the network system of the broadcasting—first on radio, then on television—is fascinating; is it not more than that, is it not a service full-blown only in its own case, but is it not a service never to offend anyone in the case, but is it not a service only of American television, utopian. Free does not, for

For example, make the point that the United States network was created for a population with widely different cultures and languages. That in increasing the number of American cultures in the United States, a television network is not only gaining a television audience in which the blind lead the blind is another story.)

This said, Pyle describes what he sees as a decline extremely well. He is occasionally on target with people, but he is usually off. The "pop music" he falls into is the "top 40" of the TV-series spin-off of "The Dick Cavett Show." The network was small and centered in New York, but it was a general more in SoCal than in Indiana. The "Roller-7" was a radio station through city streets, where it was and just in the hours covered in the book. But when dealing with the "beatniks," he writes with peculiar clarity. The epic battles between the CIA and the anti-trust authorities, the cut-throat competition between the fledgling NBC station and the established CBS for the voices of San Francisco, the "beatniks" are comprehensible and exciting. There are some good funny jokes too: during Peter Guber's time at Columbia, the turnover of top executives was so rapid that the names on the doors were not changed in time to be printed on the program in brackets. They only looked like that.

That's why they only look like that.

*Golden Calm: An English
Life in Moghul Delhi*, edited
by M. M. Kaye, 217 pp. Webb and
Bever, 1995, 0 906671 19 1
Surprises Emily, Lady Clive
Clive's spirited reminiscences of
living in the Moghul Empire and many
other things, contemporary illustra-
tions which were commissioned
from native East India Company
assist by her father, Sir Thomas
Macleay, for his unpublished
Delhi Book.

By Michael Trend

Eather and Ezio Sadler's Wells

This year the Handel Opera Society celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary by staging the oratorio *Ester* and reviving its production of the opera, *Edo*. The former was as charming and successful in execution as the latter was not, and since in the past few years there has been a notable variation in the quality of the Society's productions it is interesting to examine these two productions, representing as they do the two extremes.

London since 1732 and there is a complicated history of revisions and additions to the original score. The present version is, however, a magnificent arrangement. The story of the persecution of the Israelites by the wicked Haman ("Pluck foot and

branch from out the land") and of their eventual salvation through Esther's intervention with the Persian King Ahasuerus is perfectly suited to a production of this elegant kind. The ingenious two-tiered set, the simplicity of performance, the high standard of singing (Sandra Dugdale as Esther and Paul Esswood as Ahasuerus); a chorus much improved on recent years, and the firm conducting of Charles Farncombe contribute to the success,

Exio, first seen in this graduation in 1977, is a different matter. The parts of the Emperors Valentiniano and of his general *Exio* were last time sung by a counter tenor and a female voice respectively; this time the voices have been switched and from a dramatic point of view this is better. But there is still very little to support Michael Johnson's claim, in the programme notes, that "at eighteenth-century opera libretti go the *Metastasio/Händel*, *Exio* stands up well". The plot though of an amazing complexity holds no great surprises for

those familiar with Christmas pantomimes. And the audience, once it had grown used to the confidence as audiences do, began quietly to giggle and laugh, and, at moments, one felt that the cast was almost encouraging them to do so. A similar reaction greeted the opera when it was first produced in production four years ago, although it was more restrained then.

The costumes, although glorious to look at, were very impractical—and, very noisily, as one can tell from the incessant, weeping noises if one listens to the production on the radio (the productions are broadcast each year). Of the singers, John York Skinner was particularly fine as the innocent, but the musical standard, although high, was sufficiently low to carry the production. Although part of the blame for the reaction to this work must be put down to the audience's lack of understanding of the theatrical conventions of the eighteenth century, must also lie with the production itself, which leaves the libretto exposed to ridicule.

By Arno Schmidt

Translated by John E. Woods.

"This is a beautiful book . . . (the) English version has been recreated with exemplary fidelity and clarity. . . . The T.S. . . . contains some of the most powerfully and intricately crafted writing I have ever seen . . . scenes of great tenderness and and resonance . . . a richness of human vision . . . verbal gaiety and semantic high-jinks . . . a true original." *The Scotsman*. "A superb novelist of huge ambition and great achievement. The novel costs £50.00. Is it worth it? I would be prepared to adjust other expenditure to afford it." *The Times*. 181x x 121m, buckram, protective slipcase. 215pp, weight 9lb, £50 to January 1, 1981, £60 thereafter (add £3 post and packing).

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